

A8: Promoting the Collection

Book Store Visit

Visit a Bookstore to learn about their selection, collection development, and promotional techniques. State how their practices inform your PR plan.

As a self-proclaimed book store junkie, I thought I knew pretty much everything about how a bookstore is arranged and have often “borrowed” ideas for displaying books in the John Muir High School Library. I took several visits to two different Barnes and Noble stores in recent weeks and was surprised at how little I really know about how they display and market their wares. I spoke to the Education Consultant at the Redlands store and learned a few interesting things. Not everything that is newly published makes it to the promotional shelves and not everything that is being promoted receives their standard Member Discount. Although I thought I understood that a bookstore is not a library, the recent changes in merchandise and promotional techniques at Barnes and Noble has really driven that fact home. I asked a few questions about how they choose what books to stock and was surprised by those answers as well. Apparently, shopping at a store for years does not qualify as knowing how they manage their selection, collection development and promotional issues.

Buying a new book from Barnes and Noble is always easy or at least I thought so. When I asked about how new books are chosen for the shelves in Redlands, the Consultant explained that there are book buyers that serve several stores. It is their responsibility to decide what titles will be the next big sellers in their geographic areas. Then the books are purchased and some of them are sent to the stores. The rest are held in a warehouse to restock the stores shelves when customers request them. Not all the newest titles are placed on the new book shelves though. Some titles are put away on the regular shelves with only a very few copies placed on promotional display. The reasoning is that if the book is marginally popular and the publisher is not actively advocating for it, customers will ask for it when they want it. Books that are being promoted by the publishers and the book buyers receive prominent displays. I hadn’t noticed this until I walked around and found that all the Young Adult books that are being published in series are usually shelved on the normal shelving even though they

may have only been published in the last few days. Most do not offer the store's famous Member Discount. It's the new, first in series or not in series books that are receiving the store's attention.

The Nook e-reader is also receiving attention in Barnes and Noble. It illustrates the fact that bookstores are not libraries in an alarming way. My last visit to the store was a shock. Apparently e-books and e-readers are selling much better than hardbacks or paperbacks. For this reason, B&N has rearranged many of their stores to feature the Nook and to provide a semi-comfortable place for customers to sit and explore what they have to offer. There are big screens displaying current e-books and video book trailers and working models of each type of Nook to touch and use. The entire center of the Redlands store is now devoted to the Nook. The books that were shelved there are either gone to the warehouse or moved to the far corners of the store. Now if I want to purchase a book that I recently heard about, I will have to consider it in the electronic version first unless I want to wait for the hard copy to be delivered. In fact, I can now get a book that I'm looking for almost immediately and don't even have to visit the store. When I asked why they were not serving all their customers, the consultant reminded me gently that they are serving all their customers. They are targeting the needs of those customers who most often buy books from them and will continue to serve the others. The time it takes to deliver a book from the warehouse is very short and most hardback readers have learned to wait for their books already. Ouch!

She's right you know. When I applied her points to my own collection development and promotional issues, I was surprised at how well they could suit my own customers, the students. Consider the purchasing and displaying of new books. We automatically place a book on the new shelf regardless of whether it is popular or not at the time. The popular ones check out immediately and the others, the nonfiction, the second books in a series or the brand new titles with unattractive covers, sit on the new book shelf indefinitely. Maybe we should be shelving them all and only displaying those we want to encourage the students to read. They can and do ask for books they want but seldom do they ask for something just because it's new. Secondly, are we actually offering what the students are looking for? B&N is catering to their best

customers. Maybe we should be catering to our. In our library those are the students who are reading to increase their literacy skills. They are looking for books that are not too challenging but will allow them to practice and better their skills. These tend to be high-interest, low reading level titles. But those aren't the ones we display. It's time to take a few lessons from the bookstores. When their customers stop responding to what they are offering, they offer something else. We need to do the same.

Also, the immediacy thing...there isn't anyone on earth less patient than a teenager. It appears to be time to focus on getting them what they need immediately in electronic format and stop focusing on the school library as a warehouse for old literature. There are other libraries to do that.